1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

completely exhausted or reduced to a mere trickle. The average annual rainfall over the last ten years is 29·75 in. The shore waters of Lake Pamolombe are well stocked with fish. Both districts are well wooded, with a large variety of timber trees. In the dry sandy soil where the population is unable to live for lack of water, the prevalent type is *tsanya*. A line of foothills from Zomba to Chikala are conserved as Forest Reserves.[1]

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY[2]

The Yao are chiefly agriculturists, and in the old days were also hunters. As they live largely in tsetse-infested areas, they do not keep cattle, except for a few herds near Fort Johnston and Zomba, in Nyasaland, and on the east of Lake Nyasa,[3] in the mountains of the Ruvuma valley around Mataka's.[4]

Abdullah describes a time when the Yao were economically self-sufficient, making their own bark-cloth, weaving, burning herbs for salt, and working iron for the tools they needed. Nevertheless, the tradition of coastward journeys for trading with the Arabs was well developed before the Europeans came to the country. They used to trade cattle and salt from the Manganja and Lomwe for tobacco and hoes, and in exchange for slaves they got from the Arabs gunpowder, guns, swords, beads, coloured cloths, earthenware, and foodstuffs.[5] Slaving expeditions were among the most important activities of the chiefs.[6] The old tradition of the absence of the men from the village owing to these expeditions, is continued in modern times by soldiers and labour migrants to Southern Rhodesia and the Union. These men send back remittances to the area, but the main population is supported by agriculture. Cash is needed for purchasing salt and cloth, for paying certain dues and fines formerly paid in kind—adultery compensation, diviner's and initiation fees—as well as for tax and rent. Consequently, while certain crops, such as tobacco and ground-nuts, are grown for cash, any food crop is liable to be sold in one form or another in local markets or by the roadside.

The food crops are maize, sorghum, finger millet, sweet potatoes, ground-nuts, legumes. Fish is an important article of diet. Eggs are believed to cause sterility and are only eaten by those outside the child-propagating age; milk is disliked and never consumed.[7] *Termite alates* (flying ants) are a much relished food when they come out on nuptial flights. Rice is considered a superior food, and is eaten when possible on ritual occasions.[8]

Tobacco is the main cash crop, with individual production under the supervision of the Agricultural Department. The average cash earned per grower in 1943–4 was £5. 3*s*. This is overwhelmingly an external trade. Ground-nuts, which are sold at government-controlled markets to licensed buyers, bring in only a few shillings a year to the average seller. Women obtain cash by selling beer. At the lake shore the fishing industry is very important. Natives owning big nets are said to make between £20

[1] Murray, 1932, pp. 147–61.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, the information is from J. C. Mitchell, and relates to the Yao of south Nyasaland.

[3] Young, E., 1877, p. 108.

[4] Livingstone, 1874, pp. 72 and 80.

[5] Abdullah, 1919, pp. 10–11, 26–30.

[6] See Livingstone, 1874, p. 68; Young, E., 1877, p. 139; Thompson, 1882, p. 78; Sclater, 1893, p. 422; Maugham, 2, 1929, pp. 86–7; Laws, 1934, pp. 33–7.

[7] Bannus, 4, 1922, p. 34.

[8] Barker, 1934, p. 14.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

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(*a*) Patchwork cultivation in Chiwalo area. Note how the natural vegetation has been cleared for staple gardens. Patches of ash from burnt garden refuse can be seen to the left. There are also two small villages in the foreground and a large village distinguishable by the dark patch of mango trees at the foot of the hill in the top left-hand corner.

(*October 1948*)

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(*b*) A small village in typical surroundings in Chiwalo area.

(*August 1948*)

PLATE II [facing p. 12]

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

the dry season, in contrast to the busy wet season, there is much visiting and social activities are resumed. Dances and initiation ceremonies also are mostly held during the dry season. The only agricultural work done during this time is the clearing of the bush and the stacking of the brushwood ready for burning.

The temperatures are high. I have no records for the three stations in the area because recording has started only recently. It is hottest during the months just preceding the rains, i.e. September to December, and coldest during May to August. I have never heard of frosts in the area so it is unlikely that the temperature falls below freezing point. Hornby records the mean maximum temperature for Liwonde as 82·3° F. and the mean minimum temperature as 59·3° F. These are for Liwonde station which is in the Shire Valley. The temperature for the plains and the highlands is probably a few degrees less.

Vegetation

The natural vegetation in this area varies from thick rain forest along the permanent watercourses to open grassland in the marshy patches. In forestry reserves and other places where the vegetation has not been cut out, trees 20 to 30 feet high predominate with thin undergrowth. Along the Shire Valley much of the vegetation is untouched, but in the highlands and on the plain most of the unprotected forest has been cut out for garden lands. In the open spaces between trees the land is covered by elephant grass six to eight feet high.

Population

The density of the population in Nyasaland as a whole is high in comparison with that in the surrounding territories.[1] Within the Territory itself the densities in some districts are as high as anywhere in Africa.[2] The population as a whole is concentrated in the highland districts of Dedza and the Shire Highlands. The districts in which I worked are less densely populated than most of the districts in the Southern Province, but of average density

[1] Expressing densities as total population per square mile. Nyasaland, 55·5 (1945); Tanganyika, 17·0 (1946); Portuguese East Africa, 14·5 (1938); Southern Rhodesia, 11·5 (1946); Northern Rhodesia, 5·0 (1946).

[2] Chiradzulu district, 309·8; Cholo, 191·9; Zomba, 152·4. *Nyasaland Census, 1945*, Table 8.

3: Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

Again, charm medicine may be contained in various articles which are also generally worn round the neck. The teeth and claws of the beasts of prey are so employed, generally arranged in pairs bound together so as to form a crescent and suspended from a string. The teeth of crocodiles, lions, leopards, and the claws of the same beasts and of some large birds of prey are thus employed. The teeth etc., are in themselves charms against injury, probably against what one might call homologous injury. The idea of stuffing them with medicine is probably a secondary consideration, a process of fortification of the charm so that its use comes to have a more powerful influence. It is interesting to see of late years that the native, recognizing the decorative value of these crescent-shaped amulets, has begun to copy them in lead and ivory. A series of these of graduated size is worn as a necklace by women.

When a medicine-man is consulted, part payment is made in advance, "payment to go and dig medicine (roots)." The rest of the payment is made when the cure is effected. Should a patient not be satisfied with his treatment and wish to consult some other medicine-man, he pays to the first a quarter of the fee he would have paid if his cure had been effected; this is called "paying him to get his medicine away." Unless this is done, should he recover later, he will be liable to claims for full fees from all of the medicine-men he has consulted; each will say his own medicine has gone on acting and has effected the cure. A medicine-man may take a case he is treating into his own house.

In prescribing medicine, very particular instructions are given with an embargo on certain things which may or may not have some use and significance. A medicine-man in 1901 at Malenya's, who inoculated every one in the forehead with bullet proof medicine, said that no one must step across a *mwini* (pestle for pounding grain), and no one must eat the leaves of the sweet potato.

A medicine-man always partakes of part of the decoction he is giving to a patient to show that it is harmless; I think these preparations are mostly inactive. I should hate to sample all the castor oil I have prescribed, though many natives have had suspicions about me when I have not done so.

Poisons. Though there are a large number of species in this country, both vegetable and animal, from which poison might be extracted, those that have gained any reputation among natives and have come under my observation are but few in number. *Mwai* (*Mwabé* Chin.) "the ordeal poison," is the bark of *Erythrophlœum guineense*. The natives distinguish two varieties of *mwai*, the two trees differing slightly in leaf, flower and bark; *mwai* is the *Erythrophlœum guineense*, the second variety known as *mperanjila* is doubtless an allied species. *Mwai* is the poison employed in the poison ordeal.[1] It is administered in a poisonous dose as a decoction of the bark, recovery or otherwise depending on whether or not the poison is voided by vomiting. Natives give as the symptoms headache, giddiness, disturbances of vision, vomiting and purging, with slowing of heart beat. *Mper-*

[1] Vide infra, p. 298.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

137 278 *anjilu* is a more deadly poison and is not used in the poison ordeal but is administered with intent to murder; it is usually given mixed with beer or in porridge. Death is said to be assured in a few hours. *Lipembela:* the Yao name of beetles belonging to the genus *Mylabris*, found in large numbers in June and July in the native gardens where they do much 136 278 damage to the bean crops. The name is, I think, more especially applied to a species with yellow bands, those with red markings being said to be harmless. These beetles are prepared for poisoning food by frying and then grinding into a powder. In this form, they are administered with intent to murder or they may be taken for suicidal purposes, five or six beetles being used. These beetles contain cantharidin in a greater proportion than cantharis itself. The symptoms described by the natives as occurring after exhibition are constipation followed by high fever, and death eight hours later. This same beetle is known to other tribes and is the *nsenze* of the Anyanja.

The bile of the crocodile, *ngwenje* (*ndulu*, Chin.); *ngwenje* and *ndulu* also are used, meaning the gall-bladder. Crocodile gall has the reputation of being a powerful poison over nearly the length and breadth of Africa. It is known, I think, to all the tribes in Nyasaland. In this district, they qualify their beliefs by saying that the bile of crocodiles from Lakes Chilwa and Chiuta which do not eat men is not poisonous. The poison is also said not to be used on the Lower Shiré River where, and where only, crocodiles are eaten as food by the natives. Among the Yao, the gall-bladder is removed with the contained gall, dried, and then ground in a little mortar or on a stone. The dose of the powder is said to be as much as would cover a sixpence. Symptoms are said to be great pain in the stomach, swelling and discoloration of the tongue, and loss of speech. Public destruction of [171] the gall-bladder of any crocodile which has been killed is said to be the custom on the West Coast of Africa, and the same is true of some tribes in Nyasaland as at Kotakota, but so far as I am aware, this is not done among the Yao.

The gall of other animals is similarly used, but among the Yao I am not quite certain of the species. *Lipiri*, the puff-adder, certainly is utilized, and I think other snakes, such as *Nalukuluti*, a grey, ash colored snake, *Linyi*, a water-snake six feet long, and *Songe*, the crowing-snake. Certain lizards are also employed, such as *Likwakwala*, and frogs, both *Chiulo* and the running frog, *Chinsesenese*. Scorpions too have found a place among poisonous preparations, so it is said, and likewise, the bile of some mammals. Bamboo fibre, animal hair, the bones of fish, and ground glass, I have also heard mentioned as being administered with the desire to produce a fatal enteritis.

Pupal cases made of twigs and the contained pupa (species of the family of *Psychidae*) called *shitemanga* or *shiteme nguvi* (from *ku-tema*, "to cut" and *nguvi*, "fire-wood") are said when eaten by cattle to cause death. I cannot vouch for the truth of this nor can I say whether they are ever given to man.

137 278 A wild yam, *mtwa* (*mulopa*, Chin.) is poisonous if not well boiled and the water thrown away, but is not used as a poison so far as I know. The same is true of *ngwenje*, a kind of cassava.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

Strophanthus is specially reserved for poisoning arrows and it is doubtful if it is ever given by mouth; *Kombe* is the name used in this country, but there are two species of strophanthus in Nyasaland, *Strophanthus kombe* and *Strophanthus courmontii*. The seeds and bark are used and, less commonly, the root. They are mixed with the roots of a shrub called *Nthasimba*, pounded together and boiled, and the liquid used to anoint the arrows. The use of poisoned arrows is a Manyanja custom adopted to some extent by the Yao.

A number of poisons are also employed in catching fish, *Nyungu* and *Mtulu* being the most common, also *Kawasimbila Nyuchi* (Nkudzi, Chin.), and *Chinyungu*.

Witchcraft. In my article on the Anyanja,[1] reference is made to witchcraft and *mfiti*. Beside the Nyanja *mfiti* or the Yao *mauwi*, all tribes as far as I know in Nyasaland have firmly fixed among their beliefs, the conception of the supernatural human-flesh eater. It is a little difficult to define the term *mfiti* or *mauwi*, as it has come to have the somewhat generalized sense of one who practices witchcraft, but the original meaning is defined by Scott,[2] a person who has acquired the knowledge of occult medicine by which he can kill his fellow men; "what makes the power so dreaded is not that the *mfiti* exercises this power for reasons of spite but (as is supposed), to eat the body of his victim." It is at once interesting to note that the word *mfiti* does not belong, according to Scott, to the personal class of nouns but to the *pa-as* class, which seems to imply that they believe a *mfiti* to be something outside the idea of a person. Among the Anyanja in Zomba district, however, the word belongs to the first class of nouns (the personal class) as also does *mauwi* in Chiyao.

The natives believe that any man in a village may be a *mfiti* or it might be more correct to say, is capable of changing into a *mfiti*. *Ufiti* is the state of being a *mfiti;* in Chiyao, *unwi*.

As I have pointed out under *Diseases*, practically all illness and death are thought to be due to the machinations of some person or persons. The inciting motive which may cause a man to compass the death of another may be spite, revenge, etc., or the desires of *unwi*. Until recent years, when the Government legislated to put down witchcraft, the charges of *unwi* were everyday occurrences. Whether or not the prevalence of the idea of cannibalism has any substance in correspondingly frequent practice has never been and now probably never will be surely proved. Duff Macdonald believes it to be so.[3] It is true that native graves have been and are still rifled and that the graves of some Europeans have been so opened in the past, as I have learned from eyewitnesses. It seems probable that the graves were tampered with by natives with the object of removing the human remains, possibly to be eaten or to obtain portions of the body to use as charms. Mr. L. T. Moggridge,

[1] 'Notes on some tribes of British Central Africa,' op. cit., p. 202.
[2] Op. cit., p. 245.
[3] Africana, op. cit., vol. I, p. 219-224.